

Leadership Challenges in Handling a Grit-Deficient Workforce in A Media-Saturated Environment: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary workforce has developed within an increasingly media-saturated and digitally accelerated environment, presenting significant challenges for organizational leadership. Although younger employees, particularly those from Generation Z, exhibit strong technological competence, creativity, and adaptability, concerns have emerged regarding declining perseverance, sustained focus, and resilience—core attributes commonly associated with grit (Duckworth et al., 2007). Digital media environments that prioritize immediacy, emotional validation, and rapid success narratives may inadvertently reduce tolerance for delayed rewards, disciplined effort, and long-term commitment. As a result, leaders face the dual challenge of maintaining performance standards while simultaneously addressing heightened emotional sensitivity, stress, and unrealistic career expectations among employees. This review examines the relationship between media exposure and grit, its implications for workforce behavior and leadership effectiveness, and the evolving leadership demands required to manage a grit-deficient workforce. The paper highlights the need for adaptive, emotionally intelligent, and human-centered leadership approaches capable of fostering resilience, redefining success, and sustaining engagement in modern organizations.

Keywords: *Grit, Leadership, Digital Media, Generation Z, Workforce Dynamics*

Grit has been defined as the sustained perseverance and passion for long-term goals despite obstacles, setbacks, or slow progress (Duckworth et al., 2007). Early research conceptualized grit as a higher-order construct comprising two core components: perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. Together, these dimensions reflect an individual's capacity to maintain effort and commitment over extended periods, contributing to long-term achievement across academic, athletic, and occupational domains (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Gross, 2014).

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have increasingly questioned whether pervasive exposure to digital and media-rich environments may be associated with declining levels of grit, particularly among younger cohorts entering the workforce. Excessive engagement with digital media has been linked to challenges in academic performance, career development, physical health, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being. Although contemporary employees demonstrate high levels of technological fluency and openness to

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innovation, reduced perseverance and sustained motivation present growing challenges for leaders responsible for employee development, performance management, and retention.

Digital media environments shape cognition and behavior through personalized algorithms that reinforce existing preferences and limit exposure to diverse perspectives. While these platforms offer substantial benefits—such as enhanced connectivity, rapid information access, and cognitive stimulation—unregulated or excessive use has been associated with reduced attention span, increased social comparison, anxiety, and emotional vulnerability. As digital media increasingly functions as a source of validation, guidance, and stimulation, its influence on both cognitive traits (e.g., attention, learning) and non-cognitive traits (e.g., perseverance, emotional stability, grit) has become a critical concern for organizational leadership.

Grit and the Workforce

A growing body of empirical research underscores the importance of grit in promoting performance, engagement, and well-being across occupational contexts. In entrepreneurial environments, individuals with higher levels of grit demonstrate greater persistence in the face of uncertainty and setbacks, which contributes to improved venture performance over time (Mueller et al., 2017). Similarly, organizational research indicates that grit is positively associated with work engagement, reflected in higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption, even after controlling for related personality traits such as conscientiousness (Suzuki et al., 2015).

The relevance of grit extends into leadership contexts, where perseverance and long-term orientation support constructive leadership behaviors. Leaders with higher grit are better equipped to remain focused, resilient, and meaning-oriented during periods of adversity, with perseverance emerging as a particularly influential component (Caza & Posner, 2019). Comparable patterns have been observed in performance-driven domains such as sports, where grit predicts sustained engagement, resilience, and long-term skill development (Martin et al., 2015; Larkin et al., 2015).

Beyond performance and engagement, grit also functions as a protective psychological resource. Employees with higher grit report lower levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion and are less likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviours, suggesting that perseverance toward long-term goals buffers the negative effects of workplace stressors (Ceschi et al., 2016). Evidence from high-stress professional training environments further supports this protective role, as individuals with higher grit demonstrate greater emotional endurance and reduced burnout under demanding conditions (Walker et al., 2016).

Media Exposure and Grit

Recent research increasingly points to a negative association between excessive digital and social media use and grit, particularly among Generation Z. Studies examining social media addiction have found that higher levels of problematic media use are significantly associated with lower perseverance and reduced long-term goal commitment (Salsabila & Yuniardi, 2023). Additional research demonstrates that grit mediates the relationship between social media use and academic outcomes, influencing self-efficacy, procrastination, and achievement across student populations.

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Further evidence suggests that grit—especially perseverance—may reduce vulnerability to problematic internet use by weakening the influence of impulsivity and reward sensitivity systems. Adolescents with higher perseverance are less likely to develop internet addiction, even when predisposed to behavioral inhibition or heightened reward responsiveness. Collectively, these findings suggest that while digital media use is not inherently detrimental, excessive or unregulated exposure may erode the psychological traits necessary for sustained effort, delayed gratification, and long-term success. Importantly, interventions aimed at strengthening grit may help mitigate these negative effects and support adaptive functioning across academic and occupational domains.

Characteristics of the Contemporary Workforce

The modern workforce increasingly prioritizes job security, continuous learning, frequent feedback, and flexible work arrangements (Jenkins, 2015; Ernst & Young, 2017). Younger employees tend to favor flat organizational structures, ethical leadership, and inclusive workplace cultures, while exhibiting lower tolerance for rigid hierarchies and delayed advancement (Tulgan, 2013; Patel, 2017). Job hopping has emerged as a defining feature of Generation Z employment patterns, reflecting strategic career behavior aimed at skill acquisition and value alignment rather than disengagement (Randstad, 2025; Dwiputri et al., 2025). Nevertheless, elevated turnover intentions pose significant challenges for organizational stability, talent retention, and leadership continuity.

Media Era and the Organizational Leadership

Leadership in the digital era extends beyond hierarchical authority to include influence, adaptability, and public accountability. Media saturation has fundamentally altered leadership visibility, placing leaders under continuous scrutiny through real-time news cycles and social media amplification. Consequently, leadership effectiveness increasingly depends on communication competence, emotional intelligence, and the ability to manage narratives under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change.

Generational diversity further intensifies leadership challenges in contemporary organizations. While earlier generations often emphasized loyalty and stability, Millennials and Generation Z prioritize flexibility, meaningful work, and continuous feedback. Generation Z, in particular, has been shaped by pervasive digitalization, economic uncertainty, and global instability, resulting in a workforce that is technologically fluent, pragmatic, and oriented toward personal well-being and career progression. Although this cohort contributes adaptability and innovation, challenges related to attention regulation, emotional resilience, and overconfidence necessitate revised leadership approaches that emphasize mentoring, flexibility, and purpose-driven engagement.

Leadership Styles and Strategic Responses

The literature consistently indicates that leadership styles emphasizing purpose, authenticity, inclusion, and adaptability are most effective for engaging Generation Z employees. Transformational leadership aligns with younger employees' desire for meaningful work, development opportunities, and inspirational guidance, fostering engagement and commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Buil et al., 2019). Servant leadership has also gained prominence due to its focus on empathy, ethical conduct, and employee well-being, enhancing trust, psychological safety, and retention (Eva et al., 2019; Coetzer et al., 2017). Authentic leadership promotes transparency and behavioral integrity, strengthening trust and employee engagement (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Leroy et al., 2012), while inclusive and

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participative leadership styles support collaboration, innovation, and shared decision-making (Choi et al., 2015; Shore et al., 2011). Additionally, adaptive and digital leadership competencies are increasingly essential for meeting expectations related to autonomy, rapid feedback, and continuous learning in technology-driven environments (Schroth, 2019; Sheninger, 2019). Collectively, these findings highlight a shift away from authoritarian or purely transactional leadership toward relational, values-based, and human-centered approaches.

CONCLUSION

Leadership challenges in media-saturated environments extend beyond traditional concerns of productivity and efficiency to include addressing declining grit, reduced perseverance, and weakened long-term commitment among employees. As pervasive digital and social media use continues to shape attention, motivation, and perceptions of success, leaders must adapt to managing a workforce that may struggle with sustained focus and delayed gratification. Effective leadership in this context requires a balanced approach that integrates technological advancement with structured goal-setting, emotional support, continuous development, and clear accountability. Organizations that proactively address grit-related challenges through adaptive, people-centered leadership strategies will be better positioned to cultivate resilient, engaged, and high-performing workforces capable of thriving amid ongoing technological and social transformation.

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Conflict of Interest

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